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C2F 06-23MA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JUN 2, 2006

Iwo Jima ESG and 24 MEU to deploy

Norfolk, VA—Approximately 6,000 Sailors and Marines from the Iwo Jima Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) will deploy next week to conduct maritime security operations in support of the Global War on Terrorism.

The Iwo Jima ESG is commanded by Capt. Sinclair M. Harris, and 24th MEU is commanded by Col. Ron Johnson. The East Coast ESG command structure is unique because it features a support-supporting command relationship. Essentially, Capt. Harris commands any Navy-centric missions the ESG is assigned, while support comes from Col. Johnson and the 24th MEU. For Marine-centric missions, Col. Johnson commands the mission and support comes from the Navy.

The Amphibious Group Two strike group consists of the amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima (LHD 7), the amphibious transport ship USS Nashville (LPD 13), the guided missile destroyers USS Cole (DDG 67) and USS Bulkeley (DDG 84) - all home ported in Norfolk, Va.; the guided missile cruiser USS Philippine Sea (CG 58) – homeported at Naval Station Mayport, Fla.; the attack submarine USS Albuquerque (SSN 706) - home ported at Naval Station Groton, Ct.; and the dock landing ship USS Whidbey Island (LSD 41) – home ported in Naval Amphibious

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Base Little Creek, Va. Also a part of the strike group is USS Gonzales (DDG 66), currently deployed as part of the first East Coast Sea Swap. The 24 MEU is comprised of its command element, 1st Battalion, 8th Marines; Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 365, and the MEU Service Support Group 24, all homeported in Camp Lejeune, N.C.

The strike group completed its Expeditionary Strike Group Exercise (ESGEX), which represents the group's final pre-deployment qualification, in April. The group also supported the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), which is scheduled to deploy with the ESG, in its final certification exercise, CERTEX, held in early May. Both exercises are designed to forge the strike group into a cohesive, fighting team and represent critical steps in the pre-deployment training cycle.

The Iwo Jima ESG will be deployed for approximately six months.

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NOTE: Media partners desiring more information about this event should contact the Second Fleet Public Affairs Office at (757) 443-9850 (x47127) by Monday at 3 p.m.

Media partners wishing to cover the departure of the ships should meet at the Tour and Information office of Hampton Blvd. on Tuesday June 6 at 8:30 a.m. Advance notification is required for access to the Naval Station.